



NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE COUNCIL

ASSESSMENT

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Initial Assessment: Implications of the Russia–Ukraine Conflict for the Changing Character of War

(U) Key Takeaway

Scope Note: This assessment responds to a policymaker request to explore the initial lessons learned from the Russia–Ukraine conflict for how future wars will be fought. It provides preliminary observations because the conflict is ongoing. Lessons learned often become more apparent with time or the benefit of additional context and information. Our judgments rest on the inputs of NIOs, a structured brainstorm reflecting the contributions of dozens of IC and DoD subject matter experts, and exchanges with civilian experts.

We assess that the character of warfare on display in the Russia–Ukraine conflict reflects a modest evolution in the conduct of major conflicts. As of late June, much of what we have observed in the Russia–Ukraine war, including almost all of the technologies or tactics popularly portrayed as “new,” are some combination of incrementally improved capabilities or tactics used in earlier conflicts, whether at a smaller scale or in a slightly different guise.

The Russia–Ukraine war attests to the lasting relevance and importance of both hard and soft factors in major ground combat operations, such as sustainment, training, and will to fight. The conflict also serves as an example of the lethality of large-scale ground warfare and the continued role of nuclear deterrence.

We assess that many states’ inventories and production capacity probably are insufficient to sustain a high-intensity war that stretches beyond a few weeks or months, which could lead to shortages or a reliance on unguided conventional munitions similar to those employed during World War II. States’ production capacities have struggled to quickly surge to meet the needs of forces in Ukraine.

As of late June, most of the surprising aspects of the war have been the mismatches between the battlefield effects we anticipated Russia would generate and what we have observed. We also anticipated that cyber attacks and electronic warfare would have greater effects on the course of the Russia–Ukraine war. The most critical capabilities in the fight have featured a mix of old and new, spanning both massed artillery fires and UAV-enabled strikes.

(U) This assessment was prepared under the auspices of the National Intelligence Officer (NIO) for Military Issues. It was drafted by the National Intelligence Council

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